



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### RECOVERY OF AMERICAN ALLIGATOR IN TEXAS PROMPTS CHANGE IN ENDANGERED LIST

Alligator numbers have increased so much in Texas that the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has changed the species' status under the Endangered Species Act.

The alligator was formerly classified as a "threatened" species in coastal areas of Texas and as "endangered" elsewhere in the State. Under the reclassification, published in the October 13, 1983, Federal Register, alligators throughout Texas are now listed as "threatened due to similarity of appearance." This category of the endangered species list is used for animals that are not in danger of extinction, but that closely resemble other animals that are endangered. The "similarity of appearance" listing guarantees that commerce in Texas alligator products will continue to be subject to strict Federal regulations.

The change in the alligator's status is based on studies by university, State, and private biologists that show increased numbers of alligators in coastal marsh and inland habitats. One study showed that alligator populations in some prime Texas habitats have doubled in the past 5 years. Recent surveys also indicate that the number of alligator nests appears to be near the maximum that can be supported by the available habitat.

The reclassification makes it possible for the State of Texas to permit a regulated alligator harvest. An annual harvest is already permitted in Louisiana.

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The reclassification of Texas alligators is the latest in a series of actions taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in response to the continuing recovery of the American alligator. In 1975, alligators in three Louisiana parishes were reclassified to "threatened by similarity of appearance" and a regulated harvest was allowed in those three parishes. In 1977, about 75 percent of the American alligator population was reclassified from "endangered" to the less serious "threatened" status. In 1979, alligators were reclassified to "similarity of appearance" in nine more Louisiana parishes. Also in 1979, international trade in legally taken American alligator hides and hide products was permitted for the first time in a decade, and in 1980 the Service agreed to allow the nationwide sale of meat from legally taken alligators, if the sale was in accordance with State regulations. Alligators throughout Louisiana were reclassified to "similarity of appearance" in 1981.

The reclassification of alligators in Texas does not affect their status in other States. Alligators continue to be listed as "endangered" in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma and parts of South Carolina and Georgia, and as "threatened" in Florida and coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia.

The alligator was added to the first Federal endangered species list in 1967 after poaching led to a rapid decrease in its population throughout its range. Since then, alligator numbers have climbed in response to strict enforcement of State and Federal regulations and wildlife management activities.